

## **ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN BUILDING RESILIENCE OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE CONFLICT STATE OF MANIPUR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses about the role played by digital technology in building resilience of adolescents in the state of Manipur, amidst the ongoing various unresolved socio-political conflicts. Because of its ubiquity in the present time and considering the wellbeing and developmental outcomes of young people, in the context of their relationship with digital technology, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful perspective. A multistage sampling method was employed in the study. Resilience of adolescents was found to be positively correlated with usage of digital technology. It may be said that the use of digital technology are both a cause and a consequence of development of resilience in adolescents.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Adolescents, Conflict, Resilience, Digital Technology, Ecology*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Resilience and risk factors go hand-in-hand, that is to say, resilience cannot be discussed in the absence of risks. The state of Manipur geographically located in the northeast region of India besides being known for its achievements in various fields such as sports, classical dance, and tourism, it is also widely known for the conflicts that are ongoing and unresolved. As the state is inhabited by mosaic of people of various ethnic backgrounds, the conflicts are therefore, mainly rooted in social differences of class and status, wealth and opportunity, of unequal distribution of scarce resources. The state has also had long-standing movement that has sought political independence from India or greater autonomy within the Indian Union. The ethnic conflicts could also be explained with the help of certain concepts such as uneven development, relative regional deprivation, internal colonialism, cultural oppression and failures of assimilation. The conflicts in Manipur can be broadly categorized into four, namely, (i) tribal versus the State- such conflicts arise out of a concept of distinct and separate nation, (ii) tribal versus tribal- such conflicts arise as a consequence of the assertion of numerically smaller and less dominant tribal groups against the political and cultural hold of the dominant tribal group. The spill effect of such a conflict is also seen among various contesting groups as well, (iii) tribal versus non-tribal- these conflicts are generated as a result of growth in population in both the tribal and non-tribal groups, further leading to want for more resources such as land and employment, and (iv) insurgency- insurgency in the region can be partially examined as an enterprise aimed to expand and consolidate control over critical economic and administrative functions. As a result to this, there is an

establishment of a retrograde set of social relationships in which the economics and violence are deeply intertwined within the state. The state has been witnessing hue and cry in violation of human rights. It is in the context of these risks, surrounding the lives of the adolescents that the role of digital technology was being studied into.

A multistage sampling design was employed in the study consisting of four stages and the techniques used were stratified and simple random samplings, which led to a selection of two tehsils – Lamphelpat (high conflict area) and Wangoi (low conflict area) under the Imphal West district. The tehsils were stratified as high and low conflict areas according to the informal survey conducted amongst the local residents. A sample size of 572 students (standards XI and XII) was collected from eight schools (four government and four private), affiliated to Council of Higher Secondary Education Manipur (COHSEM).

## ADOLESCENTS

While there are various definitions of adolescents available, the most accepted definition is the one given by the United Nations as those individuals between the ages of 10 and 19 numbering 1.2 billion in the world today, which makes up 16 percent of the world's population. There are several reasons for the complexities involved in coming to the precise terms in defining adolescence. These reasons according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2011), could be broadly categorized into three- firstly, onset of puberty for different individuals depending on her/his physical, emotional and cognitive maturation as well as other contingencies. Secondly, the wide variations in setting national laws in recognizing an individual as an adult. And thirdly, the roles played by individuals irrespective of the legal demarcation between childhood and adolescence and adulthood, there is intermixing of roles.

Manipur is inhabited by various tribes and communities, and therefore, the adolescents of the state are comprised of individuals with different backgrounds, ethnicity, and cultures. And for the purpose of the study, the age range of 14-24 years was taken keeping in mind the various backgrounds of the respondents, where, in some communities especially, the tribal, the starting age for schooling is late and by the time they reached standards XI and XII, some of them have already crossed 20 years. The majority of the respondents, 418 (73.08%), belonged to the age group of the range 16-17 years. The numbers of male and female respondents were 186 and 386, respectively. Quoting Indira (2014) about the youth of Manipur:

*Young people take drugs or abuse substances for many reasons. The degrading and all round system failure affecting every aspect of the society arising out of misgovernance, corruption, and lack of opportunity for progress aggravates this menace in Manipur. May be they do so in order to cope with the frustration in life due to poverty, unemployment, broken family, unrest of mind and for self-amusement or for satisfying company of friends. (p. 17)*

## RESILIENCE

Resilience has come to mean the ability of an individual to overcome adversity and difficult lives challenges, and to continue with his/her normal growth and development. The concept of resilience was borrowed from the field of physics where it originally meant to bounce back or spring back after being held down. According to Dr. Ungar, resilience is best understood as follows, "Resilience is both an individual's capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual's family, community, and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways" (Resilience Research Centre, 2006, p. 5).

Early studies of resilience, almost always focused on the individual as the locus of change; and the environment such as family, school, religious institution or community, was assessed for its influence on the developmental processes of

individual, only. The core focus had been on the qualities of the individual rather than on the qualities of the environment. The individually focused view of resilience gives less attention on the processes of social production and more on the individual's temperament that makes him or her amenable to change. During recent years there has been a profound shift to a multilevel, dynamic systems model of risk and resilience with a new emphasis on the processes that are embedded in contexts of human life. It is crucial to understand how culture as intersect, compete or complement macro and microsystemic influences in order to understand how social ecologies are shaped in ways that support or hinder resilience process.

Supkoff, Prig and Sroufe (2012) in their work titled *Situating Resilience in Developmental Context*, show that the 'hierarchical' or 'cumulative' feature of human development is particularly relevant in the study of resilience. They show that when individuals overcome adversity or recover from exposure to trauma, their success is attributed to earlier positive supports and experiences of positive adaptation. There are multiple levels within a person's ecology that impact resilience and identifying them enhances the possibility of targeting a variety of contexts which could be intervened so that risks could be reduced and resources increased, and also strengthen protective systems. In order to maximize the outcomes of resilience, such an ecologically informed perspective might be crucial. Various organizations like international humanitarian and economic agencies, including United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, have also offered their leadership as well as funding for a more diverse research on resilience.

## DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY USAGE

In the present world we live in, digital technology has so much become part of our daily lives so much so that it fills huge substantial portion of the constructive minutes and hours of our days. Contacting people has become just a few keystrokes away, making the world much smaller than ever. It has become ubiquitous that one cannot imagine life without digital technology. The first thing most of us do now when we wake up is reaching for our smartphones and checking before bed is the last thing we would do. The evolution of digital technology is at such a fast pace that the portability of our digital media technology has made us to the point of almost 'always on' or 'always available'.

In our seek for diversions from unpleasant tasks and events happening around us or in our avoidance from being left out and behind, we look for the possibility of messages that would soothe us, look for new information even though it's trivial. This behaviour which is addicting floods the brain with dopamine, a pleasure drug, every time the smartphone beeps for new information. With time, the dosage for this stimulation has to be increased to reach that original high, and this makes us lose our ability to enjoy and find pleasures in the simple things in life (Levitin, 2015, para. 4).

**Relationship:** There's a change in the trend on how we maintain and nurture our relationships with others; they are increasingly mediated through digital technology, now. Maintaining online relationships has become so convenient that we sometimes become so complacent in doing our parts to keep the important relationships alive by nurturing and nourishing them through our calls and messages to show that we remember, love and care for them. We respond to messages and calls whenever we want to without giving our undivided attentions. Most of our conversations which are now media-mediated are devoid of emotions, there's this tendency of treating people as units and carefully composing and editing on who we want to be online with.

**Virtual Happiness:** We live in a world of chaos, conflicts and violence. Broken relationships and families, failures and many happenings around us have affected our mental peace and living. In such trials and tribulations times and

situations, it is our human's nature to find a safe haven which would keep us away or divert our minds from all the unpleasant and unwanted things. As people of the present time living in a highly advanced easily available technology, social media seem to be the most sought after resort to ventilate our discontent feelings, we look for some messages or pictures to uplift our spirits, though this resort serves as a temporary measure or consolation. Youngsters especially adolescents tend to seek for 'virtual happiness' on social media and since it is where they find this 'happiness' which they don't find in the real world they are living in, they tend to stick with this happiness giving device 'smartphones'.

**Selfies:** Selfie, as the name suggests is a self taken picture of oneself, how one wants to be seen by others. The irony is, we have control over our images on how we would like to portray them but exercising the portrayed images in real life is very difficult. What one chooses to put on social media is determined by the exposure one has had and is having and also the upbringing. Therefore, selfie is an extension of a person. We post because we have control over the images and the captions on them. "... but what we put out there, what we chose to share, what we want people to think of us, these are governed by other factors, like our deepest insecurities or a stray experience that has shaped our way of thinking" (Acharjee, 2016, p. 62).

## ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Given the ubiquity of smartphones, digital technology and the seeming immersion of young people in it, the significance which Bronfenbrenner places in on daily activities, in his ecological systems theory, becomes useful. Therefore, the daily activities in the lives of young individuals, according to the ecological perspective, may necessarily include digital technology or the social media uses. And the use of social media is both a cause and a consequence of development according to the theory. Young social media users, based on their goals, interests and also temperament, may reason, decide and choose how to spend their time. The decisions on how to spend their time also take into consideration the young person's context, family situation and social relationships. All of these play significant roles in influencing time spent, whether the use is active or passive, skilled or unskilled.

Bronfenbrenner allows us to see the bidirectional relationship between young users of social media and the social media platform itself. On one hand, we see users subject to influences that operate in their daily lives (social media), as passive recipients of social media content and being affected. And on the other hand, we see them as actively shaping their experiences with social media, the social media landscape and consequently, their development. Therefore, the ecological theory allows us to see the interactions of young social media users with other systems in the ecology- microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

**Microsystem:** In the microsystem, the young user sits at the innermost level of the system including his or her individual characteristics, personality and temperament. As this is the system that involves direct contact and is personal, placing the digital technology or social media platforms in it helps us to consider the direct interactions between user and family, user and peer, user and school, and user and social media platform contexts, when thinking about the wellbeing and developmental outcomes.

Thus, for the purpose of the present study, the digital technology usage is placed in the micro system where there is bidirectional relationship directly between an individual and the digital technology or the social media platforms.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

It has become critical to view digital technology as a new social environment and the role it plays in the lives of youngsters in coping up with the various adversities they face. As a social context, this virtual world is being explored on universal adolescents' issues pertaining to identity formation, sexuality, and self worth; it allows the adolescents to participate and co-construct their own environment through multiple communication functions such as e-mails, social media, blogs and many others. Easy and continuous internet access provides tremendous opportunities for adolescents to socialize, allowing them to connect with their peers and complete strangers across the world (Louge, 2006, p. 2).

The resilience of adolescents in Manipur and their usage of digital technology were measured using five-point likert scales (adapted from The Child and Youth Resilience Measure, Youth Version by Resilience Research Centre, 2016, and Scale on Social Networking Usage by Gupta and Bashir, 2018). The reliability of the tools were tested using Cronbach's alpha, giving values of 0.84 (i.e. good) and 0.73 (i.e. acceptable), respectively, and going by face and content analysis for the validity of the tools. It is found that there is a significant positive correlation between the two variables- resilience of adolescents and digital technological usage ( $p = 0.001$ ) but, this relation is rather a very weak one ( $r = 0.16$ ). Certain question and statements in the questionnaire like, 'how often do you use social media? (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.)' had a mean score of 3.16, 'I feel helpless without my mobile phone' had a mean score of 2.61, and 'I find happiness in the virtual world (social media) that is missing in the real world' had a mean score of 3.11.

The above results show that the role of digital technology in the lives of adolescents cannot be ignored. Seeing that it has got a positive significant relationship with resilience though a very weak one, it could be said that it plays a significant part in temporarily dealing and dodging away with the problems of the adolescents, if not permanently. With a good number of adolescents often using social media and in search of happiness in the virtual world (social media) could also be considered as how the digital technology has become a safe haven for the youngsters to go to whenever feeling low or facing certain problems and difficulties in life. It could be concluded that technology, though it had some degree of role in the resilience of adolescents, it did not have a profound one. One could be efficient and easily post an upbeat encouragement which is much easier than sit quietly with a hurting friend, but eventually and ultimately; these cursory, superficial and convenient online connections would leave a person feeling lonely. These are not the type of relationships God has designed for the human race. Rather, human beings are designed to be with one another in person, to hear the voice of one another, see face and know the heart.

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